Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Sheridan Region

July 2016 Newsletter

Mule Deer Habitat Assessments Completed

Kaycee Game Warden Grant Gerharter records data during the mule deer habitat assessments .

Terrestrial Habitat Biologist Todd Caltrider, Kaycee Game Warden Grant Gerharter, Buffalo Game Warden Jim Seeman and Buffalo Wildlife Biologist Dan Thiele teamed up to conduct a number of habitat assessments in the Upper Powder River Mule Deer Herd Unit (Hunt Areas 30, 32, 33, 163 and 169) as part of the ongoing Mule Deer Initiative. The purpose of the habitat assessments is to determine the current condition of mule deer habitat and to get a better understanding of how habitat changes throughout time in the herd unit may be contributing to depressed fawn ratios. Numerous other factors have been identified affecting this mule deer herd including drought, competition with white-tailed deer and elk, harvest, predators and vehicle mortality.

An example of crucial mule deer winter range that was assessed near The Horn in the Upper Powder River Mule Deer Herd Unit (photo at left).

Sheridan Region

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Fish Passage Projects Being Conducted

Aquatic Habitat Technician Becky Hixenbaugh determines a stream flow volume on the Acme Ditch on West Pass Creek.

Aquatic Habitat Biologist Travis Cundy and Aquatic Habitat Technician Becky Hixenbaugh are conducting two projects focusing on irrigation ditches and potential fish passage issues. One is at the Interstate Ditch, along the Tongue River. Creating a fish ladder is being considered to restore fish passage. Trap netting is being used to determine if a fish screen is needed once the structure is built. The netting thus far has caught stone cats, rock bass, smallmouth bass, creek chubs, a variety of sucker species and a few crayfish. These data will also provide a baseline for comparison in the future if a fishway is installed at the dam.

The second project involves entrainment netting also using a trap net in the Acme Ditch on West Pass Creek. The goal is to investigate how many Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YSC) are entering the irrigation ditch, as West Pass Creek is part of the Yellowstone cutthroat trout's historic range. Any YSC caught in the ditch are returned into West Pass Creek while all other trout caught are removed to reduce the potential of competition with YSC. So far, the netting effort has caught one YSC and one brook trout.

Flow rates are calculated at both projects to develop a stage-discharge relationship for the irrigation ditches. The stage-discharge relationship will be correlated with water level data to determine flow volumes and the number of fish per hour per volume.

Aquatic Habitat Technician Becky Hixenbaugh checks a trap net to see if fish have moved past the Acme irrigation ditch diversion on West Pass Creek.

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Birds Banded at Keyhole Reservoir

Desirae Kirsch prepares to release a male American Goldfinch that was captured during the Audubon Rockies bird banding at Keyhole Reservoir.

Audubon Rockies has been banding birds for several years at Keyhole Reservoir to determine survival, breeding site fidelity and to get the public involved so they can develop a better appreciation for the bird community. Keyhole Reservoir is selected as a bird banding site because of the diverse habitat types found there; such as Ponderosa pine, sagebrush steppe and riparian areas. The Keyhole area is also a "biological crossroads" for birds with eastern and western varieties occupying the same habitats.

Seven times during the summer, from June to August, specialized nets, called mist nets, are deployed to catch the birds. On sample days, ten mist nets are set up in different habitat types to capture birds using those habitats. The nets are set up at daylight and kept up until noon. When a bird is captured in the mist net it is carefully removed, identified and if it has been captured before and carries a band on its leg, the band number will be recorded. If no band is present, and the bird is of a species that additional information is needed, a band will be placed on the bird's leg. The birds are then released.

During a typical sampling day, the nets will capture about 30 birds, but there have been days where up to 146 birds have been captured in a five hour period. In a typical year 200 to 600 birds may be captured representing 75 species.

Gillette Wildlife Biologist Erika Peckham snapped this close-up photo of a Kingfisher just prior to it being released.

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Keyhole and LAK Reservoirs Stocked with Walleye

In late June, 252,000 walleye fingerlings (1-2 inches long) were stocked into Keyhole Reservoir and 22,000 were stocked into LAK Reservoir. The walleye fingerlings were raised at the Garrison National Fish Hatchery near Riverdale, ND. Depending on the year, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department trades Fire-hole strain rainbow trout eggs, larger Eagle Lake rainbow trout or cutthroat trout to North Dakota for walleye and other fish species that Wyoming does not raise.

The fingerling walleye were poured across a sorting board so any unwanted fish or other organisms could be removed from the walleye prior to being stocked into the two reservoirs. No unwanted fish were found in the load of walleye.

G&F employees inspect fingerling walleye to remove unwanted organisms as the fish move across the sorting board.

A net full of fingerling walleye are added to a bucket so they can be transferred to the sorting board.

A bucket of fingerling walleyes is poured onto the sorting board.

As the walleye fingerlings move down the sorting board they are inspected for undesirable species.